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**INSURGENCY IN THE HOOD: UNDERSTANDING
INSURGENCIES THROUGH URBAN GANGS**

by

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June 2006

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**INSURGENCY IN THE HOOD: UNDERSTANDING INSURGENCIES THROUGH
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ABSTRACT

Past, current and future military endeavors will invariably involve conflict at the sub-state level. A recurring problem in the study of insurgent conflict is a lack of data that has the breadth, depth, and historical accuracy to provide insight as to why, at the individual level, people participate in insurgency. Accessibility to street gangs provides a comprehensive source of data not seen in insurgencies. Street gangs provide a "ground truth", to the interaction between the state and organized sub-state group in a competition for control.

The individuals who fuel both sides of this competition for control are basing decisions to participate in insurgency on a framework founded in rational actor theory, but modified by their perspective of the world. Groups who wish to recruit individuals into their insurgency apply incentives and disincentives selectively to individuals to compel membership. As a group gains more members it can apply more incentives, increasing the rate or future recruitment and level of control over a community.

A comprehensive and effective strategy cannot be developed to counter these insurgent forces without answering the fundamental questions behind individual participation first. This thesis examines insurgency from the individual level and proposes concepts that must accompany any attempt to combat rebel groups.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
A.	PURPOSE	1
B.	BACKGROUND	3
	1. Macro Differences	3
	2. Micro Similarities	3
	a. <i>The Commonality of Control</i>	4
	b. <i>Common Aspect of Passive Support</i>	5
	c. <i>Commonality of the Underworld</i>	6
	d. <i>Similarities in Membership</i>	6
C.	CONCLUSION	7
II.	THEORY	9
A.	PAST APPROACHES	9
B.	INDIVIDUALS AS RATIONAL ACTORS IN THE INSURGENCY ..	11
	1. Rebel Group	11
	2. Selective Incentive	11
	3. Expectations	12
	4. Common Frame of Control and Authority Between Individuals	12
	5. Control	14
C.	THEORY	14
	1. Rationality and Neighborhood Control	14
	2. Rational Actor Model	16
	3. Rebel Group Fundamentals, Understanding Control and Participation	18
	4. Common Frame's Role	19
	5. Additional Conditions	21
	6. Limitations	21
D.	RESEARCH SUBJECT	22
	1. Why Second Generation Gangs	22
	2. The City of Salinas	23
III.	WHY THEY JOIN	25
A.	INTRODUCTION	25
	1. The Neighborhood	25
B.	RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL	27
	1. Benefits and Expectations	27
	2. Costs and Expectations	29
	3. Control and Selective Incentives	30
C.	COMMON FRAME	32
D.	ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS	33
	1. Demographic Motivators	33
	2. Needs Fulfillment	34
	3. Stair Step to Membership	34

E.	CONCLUSION	35
IV.	WHY THEY STAY IN	37
A.	INTRODUCTION	37
B.	RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL	37
1.	Benefits and Expectations	37
2.	Costs and Expectations	38
3.	Control and Selective Incentives	39
a.	<i>Social Network Theory</i>	41
b.	<i>Physical Manifestations of Loyalty and Affiliation</i>	42
C.	COMMON FRAME AMONGST GANG INDIVIDUALS	42
D.	ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS	43
E.	CONCLUSION	44
V.	WHY NEIGHBORHOODS PASSIVELY SUPPORT GANGS	47
A.	INTRODUCTION	47
B.	RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL	47
1.	Benefits and Expectations	48
2.	Costs and Expectations	49
3.	Control and Selective Incentives	50
C.	COMMON FRAME	52
D.	ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS	53
1.	Collective Efficacy	53
2.	Group Victimhood	55
E.	CONCLUSION	56
VI.	CONCLUSION	59
A.	PURPOSE	59
B.	THE THREE QUESTIONS	59
1.	Why They Join	59
2.	Why They Stay In	60
3.	Why Neighborhoods Passively Support	60
C.	IMPLICATIONS TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY	61
D.	FUTURE STUDIES	61
E.	COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY	62
	LIST OF REFERENCES	65
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	71

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Growth of Control [From Common Frames.].....	20
Figure 2.	Passivity matrix.....	51
Figure 3.	Growth of Control From Common Frames.....	61

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to explain individual participation in insurgent organizations. Past, current and future military operations will invariably involve conflict at the sub-state level. These sub-state conflicts go by many names: guerrilla war, rebellion, and revolution. For the purpose of this thesis, the term insurgency is defined as a popularity based conflict for control of a fixed political space between a sovereign government and a sub-state group.¹ A recurring problem in the study of insurgent conflict is a lack of data that has the breadth, depth, and historical accuracy to provide insight as to why, at the individual level, people participate in insurgencies. Accessibility to street gangs provides a comprehensive source of data not seen in insurgencies.² Street gangs provide "ground truth" to the interaction between the state and organized sub-state groups in a competition for control.

The individuals who fuel both sides of this competition for control are basing decisions to join, participate in insurgency, or passively support an insurgency on a decision framework described best by a rational actor theory³. This rational decision is based on

1 This definition is developed from the Naval Postgraduate School Seminar on Guerrilla Warfare, McCormick, Gordon. January 2005

2 Irving A. Spergel, *The Youth Gang Problem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 16-24

3 Mark Irving Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 5-13

- Graham Allison and Phillip Zalikov, *Essence of Decision* (New York: Longmann Press, 1999)

the individual's perception of society and the values of benefits and costs for different decisions. Individuals in insurgent neighborhoods have common frames of the costs for action. The individual's perspective of the world serves as the foundation for any participation in an insurgency. The costs and benefits of decisions are bounded by the individual's perspective of the world.⁴ This bounded perspective is a common frame as defined later in this thesis. The common frame is looked at by the individual as a reference for values to the benefit and cost elements of the rational actor model. This complex, rich and reinforcing rational choice framework explains why individuals join, participate in, and support insurgent groups.

Ultimately, the decision to join a rebel group is greatly influenced by the individual or group that has the most control of the neighborhood. As control is exerted over individuals or groups, the rational actor model is correspondingly influenced. The influence groups exert over individuals changes the individual's perception of costs and benefits over time as multiple iterations of the rational actor model are executed. More exertion of control over individuals in a neighborhood, serves to further change the values of benefits or costs within the rational actor model of the individuals.

To develop a comprehensive and effective strategy to counter insurgencies the fundamental questions concerning participation must be answered. This thesis examines the reasons for participation in rebellion and proposes

⁴ Allison, 10-36.

- Lichbach, 12-26.

concepts that must accompany any attempt to combat rebel groups in their fight for control.

B. BACKGROUND

The examination of insurgencies and theories to understand them are taken from two perspectives: the macro level perspective and the micro level perspective. Differences at the macro or organizational level may lead some to disregard similarities between street gangs and insurgencies. Contrary to this are the fundamental micro or individual level similarities explaining participation and passive support at the individual level. These similarities transcend macro differences.

1. Macro Differences

At the macro level, the insurgency is competing through the combined use of political rebellion and military force to bring about change at the societal and political level. This rebellion from authority is fundamentally different from the organized street gang in both scope and purpose. The insurgent's goal is the modification of state authority, while the street gang looks for monetary gain. Control for the gang is a function of its desire to attain wealth. The gang is a parasite, while the insurgent movement seeks total change for the existing state. These macro differences are functions of the organizational goals and not the individual motivators. To understand, and ultimately defeat the gang or insurgency the individual motivators for participation in rebellion must be identified.

2. Micro Similarities

The micro level demonstrates fundamental similarities between the insurgency and the street gang at three levels:

The individual choice to join, to stay in, and the decision to passively support by not fighting the insurgent or street gang.

a. *The Commonality of Control*

Both the gang and the insurgency share the necessity of control. The street gang requires control at the local level to ensure profits. The street gang maximizes its financial gains through localized control of neighborhoods and communities. To attain the macro level goal of regime change the insurgency similarly requires control at the local level. Without control, neither the insurgency nor the gang can achieve their goals.

To maintain this necessary control, both the gang and the insurgency use coercion and intimidation. This coercion has the ability to manipulate the community and the community's perceptions of society within which it exists. The individuals within a community share a common frame of the power of a gang. This common frame maintains the gang as a lynchpin in assessing the values of benefits and costs in making rational decisions. This in turn affects the control the gang or insurgency has over the individual. The dynamic of control by the gang or insurgency allows for a shaping of the expectations of individuals and the associated costs of action both in and out of the neighborhood. As individuals believe in the controls of the gang or insurgency, the power of the group grows.⁵ The result is a self-perpetuating mechanism of control over both the individual and the community.

⁵ Nathan Leites and Charles Wolfe. *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytical Essay of Insurgent Conflicts* (Chicago: The Rand Corporation, 1970), 28-46.

This thesis demonstrates that individuals join gangs and insurgencies because their perspective of society leads them to rebellion. This decision to join comes about because the individual determines that joining in rebellion is the most efficient means to achieve their desires. Many of these pressures are rooted in a perception of frustration in the opportunities viewed in society. Members of the Crips, Bloods, Lions, Ansar al Sunna, and FMLN all maintain membership in these organizations for the same core reasons. We will show that they see membership as a way to achieve personal gain at minimal cost and a minimum of frustration.

b. Common Aspect of Passive Support

Passive support is common in any community. Individuals do not see an associated evil with inaction. In contrast to this sentiment that there is no evil in inaction, the street gang and the insurgency both rely upon passivity to maximize their benefits. Passivity is a form of endorsement. Communities do not see their inactivity as contributing to the problem, but to the insurgency and gang passivity is a tool. The gang or insurgency must secure community passivity to ensure authorities cannot collect intelligence on the illegal activities of the group. Passive support and overcoming it is at the core of confronting and changing the individual's perception of the values of the benefits and costs to their decisions established by the gang or insurgent group. The passivity of the neighborhood, shared with gangs and insurgencies is a collective action dilemma.⁶ There is little incentive to

⁶ Lichbach, Mark Irving. *The Cooperators Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 5-24.

entice individual participation. The result in both instances is common inaction despite collective need for action.

c. Commonality of the Underworld

The clandestine or illegal nature of the insurgency and the gang is another similarity. Both entities rely upon illegal activities to achieve their macro goals. Both the gang and the insurgency operate in Bell's *Dragonworld*.⁷ This world, occupied by individuals who are in hiding from lawful authorities, is filled with obstacles due to the necessity of staying out of sight of authorities. To operate in the dragonworld simple communication and recruitment of new members is hampered by authorities and requires more forethought to prevent capture. They suffer in similar manners by having to use clandestine networks of information and often have to evade authorities. In this fashion, gangs and insurgencies both foster the same mentality among their members. Leaving the clandestine world is a deliberate and planned act for both the insurgency and the gang.

d. Similarities in Membership

The final similarity is membership in an insurgent group. It is very different from that of a conventional or even traditional guerrilla army. The insurgency, especially an urban insurgency, does not have standing armies of individuals separated from home and family unless taking leave from the battlefield. The urban insurgent, like the gang member, goes home at the end of the battle. Often the home is a staging point for operations and serves as a support base. The gang member

⁷ Bell, J. Bowyer, "Aspects of the Dragonworld: Covert Communications and the Rebel Ecosystem" *Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*, Vol.3(1) 15-43.

sleeps in his own bed, does not campaign like a traditional army and shares the aspects of the urban insurgent. This concept of part time membership is based on the desire to achieve personal gain, monetary or other benefit. As the individuals desire waxes or wanes, so does the level of involvement.

C. CONCLUSION

These micro level similarities serve as a basis to examine street gangs to determine insurgent motivation. Understanding the gang is critical to understanding the complexity of an individual's decision to participate in violent activity. As the reasons for gang membership are determined and understood, they can be transferred to the insurgent motivators. This will provide the ability to better focus strategies to combat insurgency.

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II. THEORY

A. PAST APPROACHES

Past approaches examining insurgencies, and what motivated them looked toward the societal phenomenon, the organization phenomenon, or the aggregate of individual preferences to make up the forces of revolution. The societal approaches to understanding insurgencies are exemplified by Chalmers Johnson's systems disequilibrium approach, Marx's structural approach, and Tilly's opportunity/resource approach.⁸ In each of these cases, a macro analysis is taken of the society to explain why revolution is taking place. The organizational approach developed by William Bender and Craig Johnson examines the insurgency as an organization within a market. This organizational approach attempts to fill the void between the societal approach and the individual approach to explaining rebellion.

Mark Lichbach, Craig Johnson and William Bender split the final approach to examining rebellion, at the individual level, into two camps: the rational actor model rooted in Mancur Olson's theories of rational actors or the relative deprivation theory developed by Ted Robert Gurr in, *Why Men Rebel*.⁹ Mancur Olson's central thesis to the rational actor in a collective group was that "only a separate and 'selective' incentive will stimulate a rational individual in a latent group to act in a group-

⁸ Gareth G. Davis, "Repression, Rationality and Relative Deprivation; A Theoretical and Empirical Examination of Cross-Cultural Variations in Political Violence." (Ph.D. diss. George Mason University, 2005), 12-15.

⁹ Tedd Robert Gurr., 15-46 *Why Men Rebel*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), 15-46.- Lichbach, Mark Irving. *The Rebel's Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 5-12

oriented way"; that is, only a benefit reserved strictly for individual group members will motivate one to join and contribute to the group.¹⁰ This means that individuals will act collectively to provide private goods, but not to provide public goods.

Relative deprivation views individuals as becoming frustrated in their current environment. This frustration stems from viewing better conditions elsewhere and being unable to attain them in a just manner. This frustration leads to violence directed at the source of the deprivation. Although relative deprivation has its merits, its foundation of individual psychological grievances limits its expansion to greater collective movements. Relative deprivation has been proven to exist at the individual level by psychologists and appears consistent between individuals. Gareth Davis, in studies comparing rational actor models with relative deprivation proved that relative deprivation could not be consistently proven at the national level.¹¹ This disconnect between individual and national relative deprivation prevents its further use.

Each of these theories contains limitations when viewed with respect to the actual actions of individuals. The authors determined that individuals are rational, but the values used in a rational actor model are subject to the perceptions of the individual making the choice. To explain this phenomenon the authors conducted primary and secondary research to develop a theory to explain this occurrence.

¹⁰ Davis, p.12-15

¹¹ Davis, p.2-10

B. INDIVIDUALS AS RATIONAL ACTORS IN THE INSURGENCY

At the core of the decisions addressed in this thesis is the rational choice model of decision making. Individuals are rational beings. At least a majority of individuals make decisions through a subconscious rational choice. Individuals weigh the benefit of action and the expectation of receiving that benefit minus the cost of the decision and the expectation of receiving that decision. For the majority of the decisions in an individual's life these cost and benefit analyses go on without conscience efforts to calculate the decision. Most individuals arrive at the conclusion from a subconscious effort.

1. Rebel Group

A rebel group is any organization of three or more individuals who desire to control a fixed political space. This group may desire to control a city block or an entire country. Their motives may be economic or they may be religious, in any case the group desires to usurp the authority of the existing state to achieve the rebel groups own agenda.

Around the world, rebel groups are constantly in a state of competition with sovereign governments. In the United States, street gangs represent a rebel group that strives to control city blocks at a time for economic gain and empowerment of individuals. These rebel groups apply selective incentives and disincentives to manipulate the rational decisions of individuals

2. Selective Incentive

A selective incentive is any input, benefit or cost, in a rational decision that provides a motive or deterrence for an individual to take particular course of action, or

counts as a reason for preferring one choice to the alternatives. The incentives are not universal to everyone, nor are they always applied. Organizations or individuals with control in the community apply incentives or disincentives to influence the rational decision making of specific individuals or groups of individuals. Street gangs use threats of violence towards individuals to gain compliance. The gang uses personal harm as a disincentive for going against it. At the same time the gang can propose monetary or power gains for assistance, very real selective incentives to some individuals.

3. Expectations

Expectations are directly linked to selective incentives and the general perception of benefits and costs. Individuals associate an expectation of receiving a benefit or cost when they make rational decisions. Individuals will also tie expectations to the selective incentives based on the credibility of the individual attempting to use a selective incentive. The gangs in most cities establish themselves as capable of violence early on. The knowledge that the gang is capable of inflicting harm provides high expectation of costs.

4. Common Frame of Control and Authority Between Individuals

David Snow and his colleagues propose, "By rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective."¹² The frames, although individually developed, become part of a common understanding of society both locally and in general. This common frame is how an entire

¹² Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Wordon, and Robert D. Benford. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* (1986), 464-81.

neighborhood could develop, over time, a common memory or understanding of how neighborhood works. Importantly, the common frame serves as a record within the neighborhood of events.

Individuals in the neighborhood have common frames of the world around them. Through the common act of socialization, individuals communicate the values of benefits and costs. They also communicate the expectations of receiving these benefits and costs. Quintan Wiktorowicz explains that as individuals communicate socially "They offer a language and cognitive tools [to each other] for making sense of events and experiences by interpreting causation, evaluating situations, and offering proscriptive remedies."¹³

This is similar to a theory by Kurt Lewin. Lewin's theory, which explains why people acted the way they did, proposed that understanding past action was critical to future motivation of individuals. The basis of Lewin's theory is that both the person and the environment they occupy determine all behavior. The person and the environment act together to comprise an imaginary mental sphere he called a life space. Life space is a psychological picture, which depicts all the facts that determine behavior at a particular moment in time. This life space sphere is then divided into numerous subdivisions representing how a person perceives his or her environment.¹⁴ This influences their decisions. This life

¹³ Quintan Wiktorowicz. "JOINING THE CAUSE: AL-MUHAJIROUN AND RADICAL ISLAM." (Department of International Studies, Rhodes College, 2005)

¹⁴ Celest Brignac, Mississippi State University: Effective Teacings in Agriculture website. (Electronic resource accessed January 12, 2006) www.ais.msstate.edu/TALS/index

sphere changes with the changing situations in life. The impact of this fluctuating perspective is that the individual's value judgment of the costs and benefits in a rational actor model continuously adjusts to account for the continuously changing world they live in.¹⁵

5. Control

When tied to the term insurgency, control is defined as the ability to see everything that happens in a given political space and have the ability to affect it.¹⁶ Control is a core element to the rational actor model. Individuals or groups that exert control within a neighborhood have the ability to change the outcome of an individual's decisions.

C. THEORY

1. Rationality and Neighborhood Control

The methodology of the thesis uses three of the micro level similarities between traditional insurgencies and street gangs to understand why people participate in insurgencies. The authors developed a framework to explain how gangs operate within the social environment and answer three questions: why people join gangs, why they stay in gangs and why do they passively support gangs. Based on the answers from these three questions we expect to be able to explain the social interactions that lead a gang or rebel group to hold a pervasive level of control over a neighborhood or area. The conclusion can then be applied to insurgencies to increase overall understanding of

¹⁵ Kurt Lewin, Dynamic theory of personality. Selected papers. (New York, 1935)

Kurt Lewin, Field theory in social science. (New York, 1951)

¹⁶ Gordon McCormick. Interview with Authors, February 2006

insurgencies at the fundamental level and how best to target the controls that a rebel group has within the neighborhood or area.

The reasons individuals participate in gangs and insurgencies can sometimes be troubling and difficult to understand. One of the first steps to understanding insurgencies and gangs is to look at how they are able to develop the control necessary to operate and get people to participate in a given neighborhood. To explain the reasons for participation, the authors developed a framework that explains why and how an individual, or group of individuals, make decisions that leads them to participating in rebel activity.

The authors' theory starts from the cornerstone that individuals are rational actors. Using rational actor as the basis the authors define how gangs and insurgencies are able to get participation from the communities they affect. Within the supply based analysis of insurgencies developed by Lietes and Wolf in *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytical Essay of Insurgent Conflicts*¹⁷ they explain how and why an insurgency establishes control within an area. Using selective incentive the rebel group is able to mobilize resources. Within this paper we are looking at mobilizing participation and the development of control. The authors of this thesis then apply the rational actor model to individual decision within the gang neighborhood and show how the individual decisions lead to common frames within the rebel group or gang area. The authors believe that when the common frames established and understood throughout a community, then the control that the rebel

¹⁷ Lietes, 28-46

group has developed will be clear to see, and in turn will give the reader a better understanding of why people participate in insurgent activity.

Through research, the authors identified specific cultural and environmental characteristics that contribute to the gang participation. The authors view these characteristics as additional conditions. These characteristics are not directly tied to the rebel activity but further explain why individual participate in rebel activity. These additional conditions explain the phenomenon that gives individuals specific values for cost, benefits and expectations for rational decisions. The authors believe that these additional conditions also need to be understood to see the entire picture of why people participate in rebel activity. In the following part of this chapter, the authors will further describe their theory of rational actions forming a common frame that leads to a more complete understanding of the controls exerted by a rebel group by further explaining each sub portion of the theory. In the conclusion of the thesis the authors will show that from understanding of basic individual decisions a common frame can be defined. Using the developed common frames and the additional conditions from the area, the controls that the rebel group applies over the people will be clear to see and in turn provide for a more efficient way to target the rebel group's control and the reasons people participate in gangs or insurgencies.

2. Rational Actor Model

Individuals decide to act as described by the rational actor model. The individual weighs the value of a benefit

and the expectation of receiving that benefit, minus the value of costs and the expectation of that cost to determine whether to join or not join the gang. The equation is simple. The important aspect of the equation is that it is continuously being applied to all decisions. The individual assesses the values of costs and benefits every moment of every day.¹⁸ The values for each of the four variables are determined through the individual's perception through the frame. Any group or individual that exerts control over that environment can affect the common frame, therefore changing the values of the four variables. The sum of the neighborhoods decisions over time change the common frame of the neighborhood.

By using this methodology described, it is possible to derive the motivators for making single decisions, and place them in perspective to the overall decision-making process of the individual and the common frame. The outcome of this process is a determination of how the common frame provides information that individuals use in making decisions and which groups have control over the neighborhood.

The concept behind selective incentive is critical to understanding that individuals will make rational choices based on the expectation of selective incentives being applied to them. An individual will work towards their preferences, but the selective incentives will create boundaries to their attempts to achieve the preferences. The rationality applied to weighing selective incentives, expectations and preferences is relative to given attitudes

¹⁸ The four values for the rational actor are: the expectation for receiving a benefit, the benefit itself, the expectation of receiving a cost, the cost itself. $(E_b * B) - (E_c * C) = \text{Decision}$

and beliefs. People act to advance their pure preferences, but the common frame tempers those actions.¹⁹

Expectations are directly linked to selective incentives. The individual understands expectations of receiving selective incentives based on the common frame they live in. With the changing dynamics of the common frame, the expectations of receiving selective incentives also change.

3. Rebel Group Fundamentals, Understanding Control and Participation

The rational decision happens in all communities. The major change in a gang or insurgent neighborhood is control exerted by some groups other than the state or government. When looking at a rebel group's environment all decisions are greatly influence by the pervasive control exerted by the rebel group in the neighborhood. Gangs and insurgencies are able to exist and operate because they have established control over time. As the rebel groups establish their ability to control the environment the state or government then sees a reduction in their ability to exert control. When a rebel group exerts control over a community it has the effect of changing the way individual's perceive the influences on their decision making. The rebel groups control guarantees the expectation for the selective incentives that can be provided to the individual. This in turn, changes the benefit and cost relationship with all the individuals other influences. When the rebel groups controls an area there is a high degree of certainty the gangs influence will affect an individual and a low degree of certainty the

¹⁹ Michael Taylor, *Rationality and Revolution*. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1991)63-97

state incentives will affect an individual's decision. The result is a system that gives an advantage in rational decisions to the rebel group that has established control of an area. This situation changes the common frame over time, and people assume the gang knows what decision they will make, so most decision are based using this knowledge, even if it is only based on a perception of control.

4. Common Frame's Role

A common frame, as the authors define it, is a collection of individual interpretations of all the decisions that are made by the individuals within a community over time. The common frame, when in place, allows individuals to shape what they see in the neighborhood and more importantly how it is seen. The existence of this common frame gives the occupants of a neighborhood or area the understanding, either real or perceived, of who has control of a given area and who can effectively apply selective incentives. This common frame within the neighborhood is a guide for an individual to understand the value of various costs and benefits and the expectation of receiving these costs and benefits. It is important to understand that as individuals socialize a collection of experiences from the neighborhood or area develops. This provides the people within the area an understanding of how the area operates. It is essentially the result of thousands of rational decisions over time being shared through socialization. Members in the community share their values in the rational decision model and share their decisions.

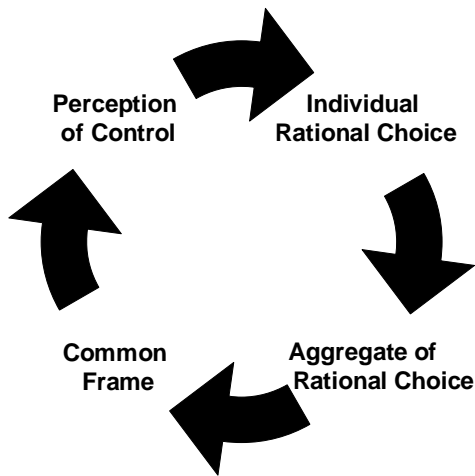


Figure 1. Growth of Control [From Common Frames.]

Socialization provides the means to convey the values in the rational actor model. Rebel groups foster a common frame of their control to undermine the authority of the state and develop new sources of inputs.

The result of this socialization is an understanding of how rebel groups maintain control without vast amounts of coercion. This conversion of authority into inputs is explained as the ability to apply selective incentives to coerce individuals into providing inputs. Often in insurgencies and especially in gangs, coercion is minimal. The question then to answer is how authority, or as the authors would describe it "control" provides inputs without direct coercion. The hypothesis of the authors provides the answer to that question.

5. Additional Conditions

The complexity of human nature and the interaction of individuals necessitates including factors that influence the rational actor model, but are not accounted for in socialized contexts. Pre-existing facts or biological conditions will always influence individuals in their choices. These pre-existing factors or conditions are explained through out the thesis as additional conditions. additional conditions are often simple common sense factors, but still require addressing.

Although, these additional conditions can be reduced to values within the rational actor model, they are not reduced because they convey important insurgent phenomenon. If reduced to mere values, these additional conditions would loose the perspective of their effect across cultures, groups, and situations.

6. Limitations

The limitations to this approach are found in two parts. The first is in the hypothesis explaining individual decision-making. The authors applied a hybrid of multiple theories that when combined overcame individual theory weaknesses. The modified rational actor theory used inherits some of the weaknesses of the parent model.

For the rational actor theory, its weakness is found in the definition of rationality. Graham Allison defined it as, "Consistent, value maximizing choice within specified choice."²⁰ Further Allison points out that by using limited rationality to explain behavior is, "Assuming an economic definition of the situation, economists impose a benchmark that stipulates the content of the 'values,'

²⁰ Allison, 31.

'alternatives,' and 'consequences' in the rigorous model. This leads many economists to overlook a wide range of values and consequences that are important to students of politics, psychological, and sociological behavior."²¹

The second possible weakness is in the research data. Time and resources limited the primary research breadth to a single city. To overcome this breadth secondary sources augment the primary research data. The initial argument of similarities between all rebel groups is used to push the theory beyond the confines of the one research city.

D. RESEARCH SUBJECT

1. Why Second Generation Gangs

This thesis examines second-generation gangs to explain insurgent behavior. Max Manwaring classifies gangs into three categories.²² First generation gangs are those which develop and disband in a somewhat random manner. These groups of mostly young males are organized based on local connectivity and a collective desire to fulfill some youthful angst, or what Thrasher would call, "Wanderlust."²³ Second generation gangs are more permanent in nature. The specific membership may shift, but the organization as a whole persists in a sub-state manner. In the United States, these gangs may span multiple cities or even cross state lines, but are not international actors. These second-generation gangs affect their local neighborhoods in a profound and enduring fashion. This enduring nature

²¹ Allison, 32.

²² Nicholas Haussler, „Third Generation Gangs Revisited: The Iraq Insurgency.“(Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2005)2-35

- - Max G. Manwaring, „Street Gangs: The New Urban Insurgency.“ Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. Pennsylvania 2005.

²³ Thrasher, 147.

along with accessibility provides readily available research material for insurgency theorists. Third generation gangs are transnational, industrial gangs. Third generation gangs stand on the shoulders of the first and second generation gangs for local influence, thereby negating their use for understanding interaction at the local level. These gangs have been examined in the past for counterinsurgency theory, but due to their nature, they provide insight into operating techniques and not individual or collective motivators.²⁴

Military intervention in insurgent conflicts usually follows other attempts to combat rebel groups. In this fashion, the military most often fights an existing insurgent organization. Prevention of insurgent activity is primarily a political and police function. If rebellion is kept in check by political or police endeavors the military will never be utilized. This timing, dealing with an existing organization, is similar to that of cities dealing with street gangs. The gangs already exist on the streets and strategies to defeat them are centered on defeating existing organizations while preventing individuals from joining.

2. The City of Salinas

This thesis relies heavily upon research conducted in the city of Salinas, California. Salinas is a city of 148,000 people. Situated in the central coast of California, Salinas is considered an agricultural city. A large percentage of the population is employed in the farming industry. The population has a heavy Hispanic ethnicity and a large migrant worker population. Portions

24 Haussler, 2-35. Max G. Manwaring, 5-14

of the cities poorest neighborhoods have population densities of 1,500 people per square acre in two-story housing. This averages to over seven individuals in a two bedroom home.

Within the city limits, there are at least 14 street gangs with affiliation falling between the Nortenos or the Sorenos. These two competing local gangs fall under the control of Nuestra Familia and the Mexican Mafia respectively. This fault line between two competing gangs results in a homicide rate two and a half times the average of similar size cities. The at-risk population for gangs constitutes over one quarter of the cities population. The result is that Salinas, although providing limited cross sections in ethnicity, provides a primes case study to determine individual motivators within a rebel group influenced society.

Interviews were conducted with law enforcement, parole officers, politicians, non-profit intervention groups, former gang members, and high school age students. In every instance, the individuals interviewed had a minimum of ten years in the city.

III. WHY THEY JOIN

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will demonstrate why individuals, especially young males, join street gangs. By using the methodology proposed in the previous chapter it is possible to derive the motivations for joining the gang and then place them in perspective to the overall decision making process of the individual and the common frame. The outcome of this process is a determination of how the individual uses the common frame to understand values for cost and benefit that the individual uses in making decisions.

1. The Neighborhood

Within the neighborhood children, get their first exposure to gangs through aspects of the society around them. The individual develops their common frame from observing the media, news, movies, fashion, friends and family alike. Groups within the society may exert influence, such as peer pressure, but the individual youth is interpreting to the best of their ability all the inputs they see and experience. Some aspects glamorize gangs, some do not, but they all leave an impression. The youth who join the gangs often do so out of a need to belong to something and for the gain in power and wealth. They feel a need to prove themselves in the neighborhood. For many kids the neighborhood provides many negative sources. One young male explained it as "I learned that my neighborhood could be violent. Everyday I walked to school, and I either got into a fight or saw one."²⁵

²⁵ Dr. Francine Hallcom, "An Urban Ethnography of Latino Street Gangs." Internet site accessed 20 April 2006. <http://www.csun.edu/~hcchs006/3.html>

The gangs of Salinas have a hierarchical leadership or a group of leaders to issue orders. The gang members have colors and logos to demonstrate affiliation and allegiance. Graffiti denotes the boundaries of different gangs. Outside of school grounds there are few limitations on the wearing of colors or logos. Kids are exposed in the neighborhood to the propaganda of gangs as often as they see advertisements for popular soft drinks. The advent of personal web logs like *Myspace.com* has provided online recruiting tools and exposure. The neighborhood is an aggressive place where young males feel the need to prove their worth in relation to other adolescent males.

Some kids will join for the "juice" or power gained through the group and getting a reputation. "The kids who joined gangs were teenagers who did it to gain a feeling of power. They join because the gang makes them feel like they are part of a family."²⁶ The gang also provides peers for socialization. The gang can provide identity, discipline, recognition, belonging and money. The kids on the street see that the gang has the prospect of providing these things and are intrigued by the lifestyle.

The neighborhood lacks controls other than the occasional police patrol. Parental supervision is limited because most families are dual income. There are few after school programs and few jobs that kids desire. Overall, the neighborhoods have a lack of formal or informal social structures that are positive.

The gangs have filled the vacuum and provide a social structure, albeit a negative one. For many years research has pointed out that the gang merely fulfills most

²⁶ Hallcom, Internet site accessed 20 April2006.

adolescent needs; the need for affiliation, belonging, and for status. Gangs provide the necessary audience for deeds of bravado, a sense of family, and of group membership by furnishing friends and camaraderie to unloved and often unwanted youngsters.²⁷

B. RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL

To provide a simplified means to see the rational actor model at work, security was chosen as the research topic. Security, and finding for oneself or a family is a core desire of most individuals. Security is a readily apparent topic that individuals being interviewed can explain. The authors of this thesis are not attempting to minimize other desires by choosing security. The intent is to exemplify the process the individual goes through in making a decision. Keeping in mind that joining a gang is a means, not an end, in the case of young males in a gang neighborhood security provides a clear and concise end and motivation.

1. Benefits and Expectations

To the average young male, who is at the greatest risk to joining a gang, the benefits of the gang are simple: join and receive money, status, girls, safety, and community. Do not join the gang and the possibility of receiving these benefits declines. To receive the benefit of any of the previous mentioned items, participation is required. Security is a clear and consistent desire amongst individuals.

²⁷ Stephen W Barron and David B. Tindal "Network Structure and Delinquent Attitudes Within a Juvenile Gang." *Social Networks*, (1993) Vol 15.No.3, 255-273.

A young male in a city is faced with the need for security in an unsecured environment. This need has values associated with it. Security maintains a high value for most individuals. This security is viewed as essential to everyday life, but the expectation or probability for receiving security is not high for most urban youths in the environment. Police, teachers and parents cannot or do not provide a continuous blanket of security.

Young individuals walking to school in Salinas are confronted with multiple security threats in a given day. In the morning walking to school, it is not uncommon for gangs to shoot in the direction of non-gang members.²⁸ This is an extreme example of the security risk individual youths experience on a daily basis. Joining a gang eliminates the risk of being confronted by a gang on the way to school.

The benefit to joining appears obvious, because once in a gang an individual will have no more fear of being abused or exploited. If expectation cannot be met outside the gang, then joining the gang provides the benefit. The expectation of receiving this security benefit is high. The value of the benefit is high and the expectation of receiving it is high.

Looking beyond the security needs of the individual, the desire to attain recognition, esteem, belonging, or monetary gains all provide motivations. Often, at risk children are seeking the things they see as unattainable

²⁸ Authors interview, Partnership for Peace annual convention, Salinas, 11 November 2005.

through normal means. The benefits the gang provides appear great and as explained below the costs of joining are low.

2. Costs and Expectations

The cost for joining the gang is not as high as outsiders perceive it. The group that makes up the gang fulfills more than just security; it provides esteem and opportunities for money and socialization. The individual referencing the common frame devalues the cost of incarceration and for a juvenile the expectation of serious jail is low. The state legal system is designed in such a way that parents have severe restrictions on their ability to punish children and the state does not provide enough. The opportunity cost to security of not joining can be high. It would entail providing security against every gang and hoodlum on the street.

Over the course of time, the pure preference of the individual is not to avoid illegal acts, but to provide for oneself. The common frame will address this further, but a sense of right and wrong are not tied to legality, they are tied to the individual's valuation of the act. The cost of incarceration is low and the expectation is low. The cost of getting hurt or killed in the gang is low even with a moderate expectation. The result is that many individuals see the utility of joining. Add selective incentives to the equation and it becomes more apparent why individuals join.

In the gang neighborhoods of Salinas, a male is considered adult at age 16, but they still have to answer core questions about themselves. They ask themselves "How do I become a man?" To the outsider being successfully

employed or providing for one's family are core elements of male identity. For a young male in Salinas who sees most job prospects as working in the fields or at another minimum wage job those aspects of manhood are irrelevant. "Additionally, in areas of concentrated poverty, young males may have no role models for being a successful male. Gangs provide a very simple and accessible definition of manhood. A man is someone who is loyal to his friends and ruthless to his enemies. You don't need to be able to support a family to be adequate as a man. You only need to be willing to fight."²⁹

3. Control and Selective Incentives

As proposed in the theory chapter, groups or individuals who have control can apply selective incentives to modify the rational actor model. A common example found in the gang neighborhood is the use of the threat of physical harm to modify an individual's choice to join. As described earlier, in Salinas gangs will shoot in the general direction of non-gang members on their way to school. Selectively applied to individual school children, this threat of harm provides a selective incentive to the individual receiving the fire. Joining the gang takes advantage of the benefit of security while mitigating the selective cost.

The ability to apply selective incentives is the direct result of the control the gang has over the neighborhood. The gang's control is the pump that allows the gang to maintain future authority. Selective incentives applied to individuals have an effect on everyone who hears

²⁹ Dr. Prothrow-Stith., Director of the Division of Public Health Practice. Harvard University. March 2005. as cited from internet
<http://www.children.smartlibrary.org/NewInterface/segment.cfm?segment=207>

the story. The neighborhood that has higher expectations of selective incentives being applied by the gang cedes control to the gang.

The state or gang who has constant presence can exert the most control. The individual may have a dislike against the gang, but if the gang maintains the most presence in the neighborhood, and therefore control, the individual will look to join the gang. A common social atmosphere in Salinas is kids spending their time on the street. Both parents work and the house provides little personal space. The result of this environment is that kids spend time sitting on the street. This takes place at the age where kids are most vulnerable to recruitment and are most isolated from the social forces that would prevent them joining gangs.³⁰ When this situation exists, they become prey to the gang. Alone they cannot combat the influences of the gang.³¹ Older gang members identify these street corner kids and befriend them.³² These older gang members provide security and guidance. The contact they have provides control over the perceived benefits and costs. The fact that these older gang members can maintain high levels of contact mean they provide a clear understanding to the youth of what expectations are in the neighborhood and ensures gang control is established.

An extreme example of coercive selective incentives is exemplified by a pedophile's use of photos of his acts of molestation to extort children into working for a gang.

30 Snow, 794.

31 Anna Caballero, Mayor of the City of Salinas., Interview conducted with authors 6 October 2005.

32 Authors interview, Partnership for Peace annual convention, Salinas, 11 Nov. The authors had the opportunity to meet and speak with parole and gang intervention officers. November 2005

He participates by essentially victimizing 7- and 8-year-olds, sodomizing them, photographing that, and then using that as blackmail, threatening to show their mothers the pictures, and then getting them to run crimes on behalf of the gang.³³

This example demonstrates the use of selective incentives to force individuals to join gangs. The use of coercion served to force individuals across a psychological line. Once across this line further coercion is not required. Two compounding factors ensure the individual supports the gang. The first is the fear of exposure from the act of molestation. The second is fear of exposure of the subsequent illegal acts committed for the gang. Examples of extreme coercion also serve to demonstrate how selective incentives cede control to the gang. Once this control is established, the individual's perception of the common frame is changed.

C. COMMON FRAME

The methodology chapter described the function of the sum of all the rational choice decisions over time establishing the common frame amongst individuals. This common frame is how an individual reads to establish the values they are going to place on costs, benefits, expectations, and control.

Society has the ability to retain the knowledge of multiple decisions. Individuals within the gang know that the gang can affect them. The common frame of the neighborhood serves as a recorder for the effects of the gang and testimony of its control.

³³ Congressional Judiciary committee hearing. Combating Gang Violence in America: Examining Effective Federal, State, and Local Law Enforcement Strategies. September 17, 2002 No. J-108-42, 15.

A prime example of the rational choice of individuals influencing the common frame is conveyed by Meares and Kahan in describing the proliferation of guns,

Once a few youths outside of the drug market acquire guns, the perception that gun carrying has become a general phenomenon rather than a drug-specific one can generate higher levels of fear among youths, which in turn support ever higher levels of gun carrying.³⁴

The common frame, when referenced by the individual, displays a norm that carrying a gun is allowable. Once the norm hits a tipping point, gun carrying becomes established as a long-term social fact. This fact coupled with aggressive posturing³⁵ for safety reasons, further establishes a gang centric common frame.

D. ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS

The rational actor model is an excellent tool to understand why individuals join gangs. Although this thesis primarily focuses on the common frame in relation to the rational actor model, additional conditions that influence the individuals must be addressed.

1. Demographic Motivators

At the forefront of these factors is the demographic motivation that makes up gang members. Over ninety percent of gang members are male and ages nine to seventeen are the highest risk to joining.³⁶ This demographic fact demonstrates that the angst or wanderlust³⁷ of young males

³⁴ Meares Kahan, 820-822.

³⁵ Meares Kahan, 810-825.

³⁶ 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment. Bureau of Justice Assistance BJA 2003-DD-BX-0311, U.S. Department of Justice

³⁷ Thrasher, 167.

contributes to the rational actor equation. Young males desire excitement, they want to impress girls, and they will take risks that older males usually would not. This additional factor contributes to the susceptibility of young males to join insurgencies for the excitement. The target demographic of the gang has, "Individuals [who] will be more available for movement exploration and participation because of the possession of unscheduled or discretionary time and because of minimal countervailing risks or sanctions."³⁸

2. Needs Fulfillment

The decisions faced by individuals are tied directly to a need. These needs are hierarchical in nature and therefore have the ability to prioritize the actions of the individual. If the physiological needs of food and shelter are met, the individual will seek the next lower need. The gang can meet three of the four most basic needs of an individual. The gang cannot necessarily provide physiological needs, but it can provide safety, belonging, and esteem. All of which must be met before an individual can know and understand themselves or take on higher learning.³⁹

3. Stair Step to Membership

R. Horowitz describes the thin line to cross to become a member, "The symbolic segregation of gang and non-gang youth is tenuous."⁴⁰ This reality allows for simple recruitment. Mobilization of individuals into the gang requires little beyond time and silence. This low cost with

³⁸ Snow, 464-481.

³⁹ A. H. Maslow, "A theory of Human Motivation." Psychological Review. V. 50, 370-396

⁴⁰ R. Horowitz, Honor and the American Dream: Culture and Identity in a Chicano Community, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 1983.446.

a marginal safety benefit makes the individual decision to join simple. With entire family lineages joining gangs, the individual looking at the common frame sees a neutral if not beneficial image of gang involvement.

E. CONCLUSION

The youth within a gang neighborhood join gangs for various reasons. The important factor is that when you look closely at the neighborhood the reasons they join are rational within the context of the neighborhood. Over time the numerous decisions made by individuals concerning whether to join or not join develops into a common frame. The targeted, potential gang population references this common frame when making decisions. This reference lets the individual understand the values for the cost, benefit and expectation from all the youth's influences concerning joining or not joining a gang. The aggregate of these decisions form a common frame of society for these youth. This perception shows control and authority is in the hands of the gangs. This leads to a near one-hundred percent expectation that a gang can follow through on its threats of applying selective incentives, both positive and negative compared to other influences like the government.

The youths in the gang neighborhood have a different view of how they are supposed to survive and succeed. A large portion of their view on life comes from the common frame that they developed in their neighborhood. Using their view, they may take a shortsighted look to what options they have, or they might not understand that they have a lot more options. Another possibility is they receive flawed information from their common frame that

they then use to base decisions on. Overall, to the youth in the gang neighborhood with their existing common frame, it is a rational decision to join the gang. After looking at the problem, it seems much more surprising that some kids do not join the gang.

Counterinsurgency and counter gang strategy benefit from understanding why individuals join because once answered, prevention technique development is possible. To defeat existing rebel groups, strategies historically focused in three directions: prevention, intervention and violence suppression. Once the common frame of the costs and benefits are understood in a community, the prevention strategy can be developed to limit the numbers joining the rebel group. To properly do this the authorities will have to alter the common frame that the prospective members are using to make their decisions. The next chapter will examine why individuals stay in, and by answering this question, lead to how intervention strategies can be developed.

IV. WHY THEY STAY IN

A. INTRODUCTION

The rebel organization provides a new or updated value of benefits for the individual. This chapter answers the question of why individuals, despite the cost, stay in gangs. It answers how the benefits are viewed as so great from within the gang. The rational choice of an individual to stay in is based on the rational actor model with values provided by the group that has authority and control. This reflects the updated expectations of receiving benefits, based on the selective incentives to achieve them. The common frame of the group further reinforces this new benefit value.

B. RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL

1. Benefits and Expectations

The members of gangs clearly receive various benefits for staying in a gang. The focus is on, "Things you can have, not what the sense of community is."⁴¹ Membership in the gang provides a greater utility value for effort than the average youth receives for working in the agricultural fields or other low wage jobs. Members of the gang see a reasonable expectation of receiving benefits they could not easily achieve otherwise given the past performance of the group.

Once an individual is within the gang the expectations for receiving the benefits does increase. Current culture within the gang community provides limited expectations

⁴¹ Anna Caballero, Mayor of the City of Salinas., Interview conducted with authors 6 October 2005.

outside that of the gang. "Kids respond to what [their] society expects of them."⁴² This quote from the Mayor of Salinas demonstrates the common frame within the gang communities, that the society has established expectations that lead individuals into gangs. Maintaining the solidarity can also provide means to increased power, even in prison.

2. Costs and Expectations

The cost of continued membership is low. Parents have extremely limited powers within the state to punish their children. The state has limited itself concerning options for punishing delinquent children. The existing cost mechanism, of the threat of prison, is intended to deter involvement in gangs, but prevents intervention until a serious crime has been committed.

Continued membership in the gang requires only a limited amount of direct costs. Attending weekly meetings is often the only requirement to prove continued support.⁴³ If the individual gang member wants more they can increase the efforts, but there are very few "musts" when an individual is in the gang. The level of support each member of the gang is required to put forth varies upon his or her status in the gang and desire to move up the rank structure. Shi described that, "most people only need to go to the weekly meetings to maintain membership."⁴⁴ State, federal and local laws prevent parents from intervening in many instances until it is too late. Mayor Caballero

⁴² Anna Caballero, Mayor of the City of Salinas., Interview conducted with authors 6 October, 2005.

⁴³ Shi Coda, Authors interview 14 November, 2005. Shi is a youth program coordinator for "Second Chance"

⁴⁴ Shi Coda, Authors interview 14 November, 2005. Shi is a youth program coordinator for "Second Chance"

pointed out that, "Parents feel they have no power to punish their children, they feel the laws prevent them from acting."⁴⁵ Compounding the problem of parental restraint, gang enforcement policies fall short of desired results.⁴⁶ While the gang can enforce costs of severe physical pain for loss of allegiance, the authorities have a very low level of expectation for providing any deterrence.

Selective disincentives within a social network influence the individual. Part of the shift in the common frame for an individual once they are in a rebellious organization is the disincentives associated with the fear of being ostracized. Social networks, formalized or informal, have great effects upon an individual. The common frame for the individual is changed, as discussed above. Critical as well is the understanding that an individual, once part of a group, generally wishes to stay within the group.⁴⁷ This is caveat with the understanding the organization must maintain some semblance of the same ends, ways, and means as the individual. A rift between the understanding of ends, ways, and means between a member of the group and the rest of the members of the group would result in a defection by the individual member.

3. Control and Selective Incentives

Members of a rebellious group have further selective disincentives that preclude leaving in the form of

⁴⁵ Anna Caballero, Mayor of the City of Salinas., Interview conducted with authors 6 October 2005.

⁴⁶ Anna Caballero, Mayor of the City of Salinas., Interview conducted with authors 6 October 2005.

- Diana Timmons., Authors interview, November, 2005. Diana is a School teacher heavily involved in prevention and intervention programs.

⁴⁷ Andrew R. Molnar, "Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies." (Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office, 1965), 80-82.

coercion. Individuals may have been intensively recruited or coerced into a rebellious organization, and face serious repercussions for leaving.⁴⁸ Selective disincentives within a social network influence the individual. Part of the shift in the common frame for an individual once they are in a rebellious organization is the disincentives associated with the fear of being ostracized. Social networks, formalized or informal, have great effects upon an individual. For prolonged serious delinquency to emerge, however, association with other delinquent youth within a network is required. Once these delinquent patterns emerge, they have feedback effects, further eroding the person's bond to other influences and non-delinquent social networks. These mutually reinforcing effects create trajectories toward increasing levels of involvement in delinquency.⁴⁹ This ensures that once a youth enters a gang the continued socialization with other gang members changes his common frame. In a way the individual has accepted a change to the values encompassed by the common frame that are continually reaffirmed by the other gang member. Outside influences are severely limited from being able to modify the individual gang member's common frame. This problem explains the reason numerous people within Salinas stated that the priority is preventing kids from joining, once they are in the gang it is very difficult to reach them.

48 Johnstone, J. W. C. (1983). Recruitment to a youth gang. *Youth and Society*, 14, 281-300.

Jamie Stockwell. Convicted gang members Urged to Help Teens. *The Washington Post*. Sep. 10, 2005. p B-03. Threats of violence for breaking a code of silence are valid and executed on a regular basis.

49 Gang membership, Delinquent Peers and Delinquent Behavior, 10/98, NCJ 182990, U.S. Department of Justice, NCJ 171119.

a. Social Network Theory

The insulating effect of social networks directly affects the individual's common frame. Social network theory is a complementary perspective that focuses on the impact of the social groups, on networks, in which the person is involved. All networks control the behavior of their members and channel that behavior toward consistency with group norms. "Movements foster identity construction (or reconstruction) and encourage social bonds that facilitate joining by creating a new social network and solidarity to encourage individuals to stay the course and continue."⁵⁰ Networks increase the likelihood of conforming behavior; criminal network (e.g., gangs) increases the likelihood of delinquent behavior. The more pervasive the network is in a person's life, the more powerful the effect it has on his or her behavior.⁵¹

All of the factors of common frames, selective incentives, and control are interacting to create a bond between the members of the group. The rebellious organization is an informal social institution and therefore subject to many of the same group psychological rules. Questioning the direction of the group calls into question the very validity of having joined the group. Compounding this is the bond between the members of the social network.

⁵⁰ Wiktorowitz, 10.

⁵¹ Gang membership, Delinquent Peers and Delinquent Behavior, 10/98, NCJ 182990, U.S. Department of Justice, NCJ 171119.

b. Physical Manifestations of Loyalty and Affiliation

The use of tattoos, colors, and tags to maintain a physical and psychological affiliation serves to induce further loyalty.⁵² The initial oath of allegiance often centers around, "blood in, blood out." This blood allegiance to the community ensures mutual support from members while tying it to an actual cost. This oath serves to ensure individuals cross a line. By crossing into the world of the gang member, individuals are less inclined to assist the police, their family, or any other outsider. The physical manifestation serves as a negative incentive.

C. COMMON FRAME AMONGST GANG INDIVIDUALS

Shi came from a family that was gang affiliated. Her father is a former gang member and her brother is a current member. Beyond the immediate family affiliation, the gang expanded the communal ties throughout a neighborhood.⁵³ The gang provided enhanced structure and control within the social network. This enhanced community structure is met by maintaining membership in the gang.

The reinterpretation of one's common frame influences the individual who has joined the rebel group because it creates a boundary between perceived outsiders and insiders. The individual in the rebel group has adopted a new benefit valuation based on interpretations of the common frame. The new preference structure of the individual assures that the duration and strength of the

⁵² Andrew R. Molnar, "Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies." Special Operations Research Office, Washington D.C. 1965. p.80-81.

⁵³ 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment. Bureau of Justice Assistance BJA 2003-DD-BX-0311, U.S. Department of Justice

inputs coming from the rebel group will outweigh all other influences. This creates the boundary between those who are not receiving the same level of influence from the rebel group, and those who do. Family, church, and school will have to work harder and longer to overcome the enduring influences of the rebel group.

With continuous socialization among other members who maintain the same preferences an individual new to the group will affirm the expectations of receiving incentives. This continuous reaffirmation between members maintains a stronger enhancing effect to staying in the group versus the dampening effect provided by the risk of violence or incarceration.

D. ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS

In the previous chapter the topic of demographic behavior was useful for understanding motivations. Simply put - young boys are looking for excitement and that makes them more susceptible to recruitment into a gang. Most of these individuals eventually leave the gang. The majority of the cases where individuals get out they gradually lessen their involvement. This lessening involvement coincides with age. These individuals leave because the excitement or wanderlust that is associated with youth is replaced with adult responsibilities. Much of the reasons for getting out of a gang are explained through the rational actor model. The possible costs on wives and children outweigh the benefits of staying in.

What the rational actor model cannot explain is the waning desire for excitement and the increased need for stability that adults develop with age. Most gang members

are under the age of twenty-five. Older members that do stay in typically are entrenched in the gang following incarceration.

Similar to the line being crossed by a terrorist these individuals were drawn in to the gang life until they hit a point they felt they could not cross back into normal life. Moghaddam argues that the recruits face two uncompromising forces. From within the organization the pressure to conform to the others in the group creates a boundary between the current life and previous social ties. The individual is also threatened by the repercussions from law enforcement.⁵⁴

Another important factor that came up numerous times in discussion with gang experts in Salinas is that membership does not mean continuous participation. Once a individual joins a gang the amount a individual participates can be adjusted. Even though they may not operate daily for the gang even a part time member can increase their participation when the gang requires more activity or when they choose to for personal gain.

E. CONCLUSION

Until something more tangible comes within reach of the average gang member, there is little reason to leave the gang. The rational decision based on the gang members common frame it to stay in the gang. The gang feeds the common frame that the individual is using to interpret society to make decisions. Once in the gang the influences are more balanced and could provide a way to modify the

⁵⁴ Fathali Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist*, Feb-Mar 2005, pp.161-169

common frame are diminished. This in turn prevents the individual from gathering information that would affect the rational decision process and lead them to leave the gang. If incarcerated the influences become stronger. If jail is avoided the involvement will wane, but in many cases allegiances and connections will always exist.⁵⁵

One topic that is not clearly understood is that the degree of participation amongst gang members is not equal. Some individuals may only go to weekly meetings, where others participate on a daily basis in conducting gang business. This creates a gang of unknown size that can adjust its size based on requirements or demand for people.

Important to the greater common frame is that with every individual maintaining membership in the gang, it is one more series of decisions that feed the control of the gang. The cycle perpetuates itself through membership and there are limited options to interrupt the cycle. The options have to have enough weight and duration to interrupt and reverse the perpetuating cycle.

Francine Hallcomb discussed the psychological phenomenon of youth activity in gangs well, "Delinquent youths, however, find psychological reward in disobeying the law as well as material reward in the profits garnered from illicit sales of drugs and stolen goods. They secure further reward in defying the power of authorities, of parents, and of the society at large. They receive still more psychic rewards at the hands of their delinquent peers whose approval and respect they gain. Consequently, 'doing time' or 'going to Juvie'-- as juvenile detention centers

⁵⁵ Galindo, Letticia D.(1993) "The Language of Gangs, Drugs, and Prison Life Among Chicanas" *Latino Studies Journal* Sep 1, Vol 4, No. #, 23

are commonly referred to--simply boosts their status among the group."⁵⁶ This boost of credibility prevents the deterrence of continued membership from being effective.

Once an individual enters the gang it is very rational for the individual to make decisions to not leave the gang. Though allegiance and social ties may continue actual participation may grow or decline, completely severing ties with the gang usually does not happen unless the individual goes through drastic change. The drastic change allows the individuals to see the changes within their common frame, which then allows them to make the then rational decision to leave the gang.

Understanding this process is important when attempting to get an individual to leave a rebel group. This process also shows how difficult it is for an outsider to convince a gang member or insurgent to leave their group. For an outsider to influence gang members to leave they first must establish control in the gang neighborhood so the individual has a high expectation that the outsider can apply selective incentives. Over time this new situation will change the common frame of the gang members and it will become a rational decision to leave the gang.

In the next chapter, we will look at the reasons why people in the neighborhood passively support the gang. when that question is answered, strategies to get the neighborhood to actively rise up against the gang can be developed.

⁵⁶ Hallcom, Internet site accessed, 20 April 2006

V. WHY NEIGHBORHOODS PASSIVELY SUPPORT GANGS

A. INTRODUCTION

As seen in the reasoning behind joining or staying in gangs, control and common frames play pivotal roles in the establishing of values for a rational decision. By applying the same methodology previously used, the reasoning for passivity on the part of neighborhoods is understood. Passive support is the allowance of the growth of the gang by a neighborhood. By not fighting the gang and its control over the neighborhood, the individual supports it.

This chapter proposes that the rational choices of the individuals in the neighborhood to not fight the gang within the neighborhood modifies the common frame and gives control to the gang. This action simultaneously provides a reference for values associated with costs and benefits. The result of this action is a cycle where the rational action provides a common frame, which gives the impression of control to the gang and low benefits for fighting the gang. This furthers the rational choice to passively support the gang. This recurring cycle, if uninterrupted, results in a community that will not escape gang violence.

B. RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL

The rational actor model within the neighborhood takes on a completely new perspective when a public good is concerned. To not passively support the gang, an individual has to speak out against them. The individual has to take on additional burdens and incur more cost. The benefit, even if successful is split amongst the entire

neighborhood. Even those who do not assist in ridding the neighborhood of the gang will benefit, so free riders are common.

The requirement for incentives is directly linked to rational choice theorists and the focus on Mancur Olson's public-goods dilemma. The dilemma faced by the community is founded upon rational theory that an individual will work for their best interest. A community fails when they cannot overcome the collective good problem. If the public good cannot be directly linked to the individual, no members will participate. To overcome this problem selective incentives are required to motivate the community as a whole.

1. Benefits and Expectations

At the core of the neighborhood is the individual who must decide whether to participate or not in the gang. The free-rider principle is the first hurdle for any neighborhood. Using the rational actor model in a prisoners' dilemma demonstrates why individuals do not see the benefit of participating in an endeavor to stop the gang. If every individual shares in the benefit, then there is no motivation to incur cost.

Most gang neighborhoods have concentrated underemployment, unemployment, and poor social ties. This lack of income has a direct linkage to home ownership.⁵⁷ Lack of home ownership eliminates a potential individual financial benefit to reducing crime. Lowering crime rates has the effect of increasing home values. To the economically disadvantaged non-homeowner, this fact is irrelevant. The result is a lack of benefit beyond

⁵⁷ Sampson the new economy

personal security. It is often just as advantageous to use the gang for security, as it is to use the police.

Another example of where the benefit of collective action does not exist is when we look at the parents that support the Salinas school system through the school watch program. The "Parent Patrol" maintains a very limited force of volunteer parents wearing uniform windbreakers and carrying radios. These parents ensure that students travel to and from school with adults providing security, less than five percent of the parents participate in this program.⁵⁸ The entire community benefits from the endeavors of these individuals and the cost is entirely on those who participate.

Overall, the examples of the lack of clear benefits for collective action shows how the opposite of collective action or passive support provides benefit, to the individual.

2. Costs and Expectations

The benefits to the individual who passively support the gang in terms of security are very real. The benefits of working against the gang are less tangible and tied to the social norms and values of being a civic leader. The costs of not passively supporting the gang are fraught with problems in terms of risk, legitimacy, availability and effectiveness.⁵⁹ The action of not passively supporting the gang has a higher perceived risk, which equates to a potential cost in the rational actors mind. The result is

⁵⁸ Interview with authors, Partnership for Peace annual convention, 11 November 2005.

⁵⁹ Marco Giugni and Florence Passey. "Social Networks and Individual Perceptions: Explaining Differential Participation in Social Movements" *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 16, No.1. (Mar.,2001), 123-153.

lower participation in speaking out against the gang. As the gang gains more legitimacy in the neighborhood, individuals see the authority of the government lessening and so the effectiveness of speaking out against the gang lessens. Add the cost in time, or personnel availability to fight the gang and it becomes apparent that there are many costs with relatively high expectations in not passively supporting.

Leonardo Bocanegra describes the establishment of unwritten rules in the community, a constitution that everyone abides by,

There are rules for people in my neighborhood. The rules are fairly easy. Everybody sees you and you see them sooner or later. Then when you go out shopping or whatever, people give you looks which mean 'Hi,' without saying it. They give you a nod of some sort which establishes recognition. They know and you know; you are both from the same neighborhood. Even though I do not know who the person is by name, I have seen him or her before and I must acknowledge that in some way through body language. There are rules about keeping quiet, too. You never witness anything; you never know anything about the crimes that you see committed right under your nose, unless you want to get killed.⁶⁰

This unwritten set of rules, or constitution, prevents anyone in the community from speaking out without first weighing the possible cost.

3. Control and Selective Incentives

Control within the neighborhood provides one side of a decision matrix for an individual to decide whether to passively support the gang. The other axis of the framework is the individual's preference to the gang or the

⁶⁰ Hallcom, Internet site accessed 20 April 2006.

government. The result is a framework where the majority of the time it is economical and safest for the individual to remain silent. It is only in areas that are controlled by the government, and therefore not a serious problem, that individuals feel safe enough to speak out against the gang.⁶¹

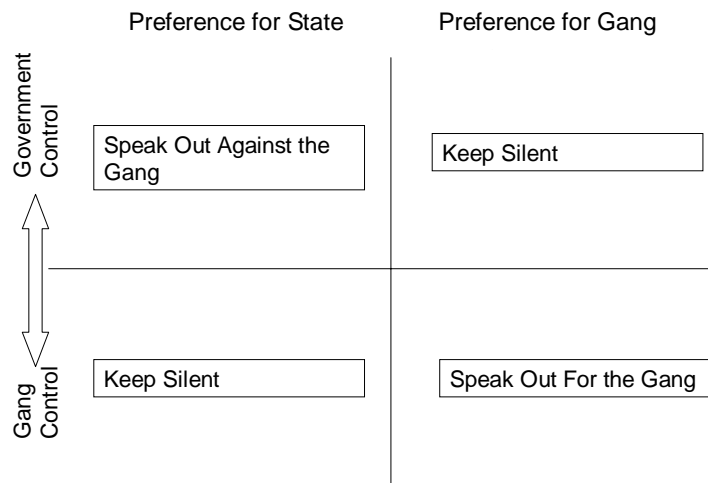


Figure 2. Passivity matrix.

With the perception that the gang is in control the individual is unlikely to speak out against the gang. The paradox is that an individual is most likely to speak out only when they feel safest. This is the time when they are least needed.

The perception of control is as real and powerful tool as selective incentives. Witness intimidation is thought of as a problem in gang related criminal cases. National

⁶¹ Hicks and Associates. Unpublished briefing on Iraq and Civilian intimidation of population. (November 2004).

Institute of Justice Studies have shown that fifty-seven percent of witnesses fear retribution from gangs for their testimony in a criminal proceeding. Less than a quarter of those who fear retribution had ever heard of an actual case of gang retribution. The Salinas Chief of Police stated "In twelve gang cases none of them [the witnesses] have ever been intimidated by gangs." The existing common frame produces fear of retribution that is necessary in Salinas for a large percentage of people to provide information against the gang. The result is a perpetuation of the common frame of retribution against witnesses. In New York,

Prosecutors report that the mere fact that a crime is gang-related can be sufficient to prevent an entire neighborhood from cooperating. This type of community-wide intimidation is especially frustrating for prosecutors and police investigators because, while no actionable threat is ever made in a given case--thereby precluding conventional responses--witnesses and victims are still discouraged from testifying.⁶²

The same problem persists across the country in gang neighborhoods. Indirect means of intimidation are perpetuated through the common frame.

C. COMMON FRAME

With few individuals attempting to stop the gang the majority of the neighborhood population is left to passively support the gang. Distrust, estrangement, segmentation and social distance all become characteristics of the inner city community.⁶³ Everyone becomes equally vulnerable to assaults at any point in time, day or night.

⁶² House Report 105-258 - Witness Protection and Interstate Relocation Act of 1997

⁶³ Spergel, 62.

The process is socialization of a destructive nature where the lack of community resources is compounded with insufficient social support in the home. Individuals use the common frame to learn behavior through attachment to a variety of semi-organized illegitimate and criminal organizations.⁶⁴ The common frame is made of passive people, which equates to a norm of society.

Over time, as a gang increases in size and control it becomes entrenched and a provider of law and order.⁶⁵ Corey Wilson was cited for his forceful point, "It's Like, now I think about myself living in Saints territory. That is the most important thing, 'cause they the ones who do stuff around here, they clean up, give money to people who need food, you know, they the ones who really, you know, affect how you live."⁶⁶ The gang replaced the state as a provider because there was no opposition to it during the gangs growth. Individuals began to perceive the gang as the best provider of needs, not the state. The more individuals socialized, the more this message of gang supremacy was conveyed. Eventually the majority of the individuals in the neighborhood believed the gang was the only answer.

D. ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS

1. Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy is a key social process that links cohesion and trust with shared expectations for intervening

⁶⁴ Spergel, 64.

⁶⁵ Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh. "The Social Organization of Street Gang Activity in an Urban ghetto." *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.103, No.1 (Jul.,1997), 82-111.

⁶⁶ Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, 104.

in support of neighborhood social control.⁶⁷ Robert Sampson, a sociologist at Harvard University, focuses on collective efficacy and its influence upon the individuals in a neighborhood. Sampson coins the term collective efficacy to, "Signify an emphasis on shared beliefs in a neighborhood's conjoint capability for action to achieve an intended effect and hence an active sense of engagements on the part of the residents."⁶⁸ It is the capacity of residents to achieve social control over the environment and to engage in collective action for the common good. The collective efficacy of a neighborhood directly affects its ability to organize and resist a gang. The physical signs of decay of a neighborhood are directly related to this. "Visual signs of decay silently but forcefully convey messages about affected neighborhoods. Disorder triggers attributions and predictions in the minds of outsiders alike."⁶⁹ This concept of physical decay sending messages as to the ability of a neighborhood to resist is important because it reinforces the common frame and the rational actor model in giving control over to the gang. As the gang gains more control over the neighborhood the more it physically shows signs of this control which prevents the neighborhood from realizing it has the ability to fight the gang.

Pamela Oliver's research on social movements relies heavily on Tullock's influence and how Tullock's theories are

67 Robert J. Sampson and Stephen W. Raudenbush. "Seeing Disorder: Neighborhood Stigma and the Social Construction of 'Broken Windows'" *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 4. (2004), 319-342.

68 Robert J. Sampson. "the Neighborhood Context of Well Being." *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, Vol.46, No.3, (Summer 2003)S-59

69 Robert J. Sampson and Stephen W. Raudenbush, *Disorder in the Urban Neighborhoods-Does it lead to crime?* National Institute of Justice: Research in Brief. February 2001. p.1

demonstrated in crowds. Oliver showed how crowds and consciousness could be integrated in collective action and social movement theory. Negative incentives used in small numbers by organizers of rallies would coerce a much larger number of individuals to participate. This observation demonstrates the power of social ties between individuals and not just the value of collective goods and costs.⁷⁰

2. Group Victimhood

There is a significant additional condition within neighborhoods found in the theory of group victimhood. Using Joseph Montville's definition of victim, "A state of individual and collective ethnic mind that occurs when the traditional structures that provide an individual sense of security and self-worth through membership in a group are shattered by aggressive, violent political outsiders. Victimhood can be characterized by either an extreme or persistent sense of mortal vulnerability."⁷¹ The gang neighborhood further falls into the expanded definition of this victimhood by having a history of traumatic aggression and loss. The neighborhood has a belief that the aggression and violence suffered is not justifiable. Within the neighborhood, there is also a constant fear that the aggressor could strike again at any time and that the world is indifferent to the plight of the victims.⁷²

As groups work toward finding an identity within the groups have chosen traumas and glories to identify who is a

⁷⁰ Pamela E. Oliver. 1-30.

⁷¹ Joseph V. Montville, 'The Psychological Roots of Ethnic and Sectarian Terrorism' in the *Psychodynamics of International Relationships*. Vol. 1, Eds. Montville Volkan and Julius (Lexington Books, 1990)

⁷² These points were paraphrased and slightly expanded upon from Joseph V. Montville, "Psychoanalytic Enlightenment and the Greening of Diplomacy" in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 37, reprinted in Volkan, *Psychodynamics and from Healing Function* p.113.

member of the group. This sense of glory gets passed down from one generation to the next without regard to whether or not the individuals have felt the trauma themselves. The result is an unwillingness to get past the feelings of victimhood. This sense of victimhood provides an identity within the group. The trauma proves to be a rallying point for the group's identity, to leave the victim mentality behind means disassociating oneself with the group. This also serves to create and maintain low self-esteem. A higher level of distortion in the groups' perception of others and the distinction that others are victimizing you is reinforced through group thought process.

E. CONCLUSION

The sum of the individuals in the neighborhood making decisions concerning passive support demonstrates that it becomes hard not to passively support the gang. The public goods dilemma establishes incentives for free riders. Low home ownership and equity in the physical status of the neighborhood precludes monetary reasons for fighting the gang. Limited social benefits are achieved by not passively supporting. These factors together with additional factors establish a common frame that discourages active support of the government and encourages passive support of the gang. As the gang maintains a long-term presence it establishes a legitimacy that exceeds that of the government. This reinforces the next cycle of rational decisions within the neighborhood.

In gang neighborhoods, the most visible effort to end the cycle of violence and gang control is through the use of violence suppression units. These police units suppress

violence in an effort to address the symptoms of the gang's control in the communities. This effort to disrupt the cycle of violence is only effective for the duration it is employed. Once funding, manpower, and focus are reduced the community will return to its previous norms based on the common frame. When the passivity of the community is addressed at the same time as why individuals join and stay in, the effects on the community can last.

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VI. CONCLUSION

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the thesis was to answer the question why do people participate in insurgencies. Street gangs provided the venue to further the body of knowledge and test a hypothesis. The hypothesis of this thesis was that individuals are rational actors making decisions based on a bounded view of common frames. The values of cost and benefit in this rational choice model were determined by an individual's perception of what they saw and experienced around them. The sum of all the decisions of all the people of a neighborhood over time creates the common frame that individuals use to determine their values and establish pure preferences.

Although this thesis cannot provide definitive statistical evidence of this rational choice-common frame cycle, it does demonstrate the utility of using this approach for understanding participation in insurgencies. Most importantly, the thesis furthers the study of social theory in explaining rebellious behavior by individuals.

B. THE THREE QUESTIONS

The three questions of why individuals join gangs, stay in gangs or passively support gangs all demonstrate that control is key to the changing of perceptions. Control has the ability to create perceptions of authority and power that may not exist in actuality.

1. Why They Join

Individuals join gangs because the costs are low and the benefits high. Society at does not provide any

reasonable alternative. What alternatives do exist are not conveyed frequently enough. Gang neighborhoods use coercion to gain new members, but it is not in a directed or unified manner. The reality is that the common frame helps an individual make the decision to adopt the gang culture. This provides more control over inputs into the common frame by the gang. The result is that every new member of the gang is also an investment in the next generation of gang member without any additional costs to the gang.

2. Why They Stay In

Staying in the gang is cheap and easy in the rational actor model. Compound the low cost with moderate benefits and social network ties and the reasons for getting out become few. Most gang members have to gain something new to replace the benefits of the gang. Building family replaces the gang family. Growing older and having more responsibility with lessened desire for excitement eventually draws active membership down. Many inactive members still maintain sympathy for the gang if not a moderate role of support. These individuals serve to perpetuate the cycle of control the gang has over a neighborhood.

3. Why Neighborhoods Passively Support

The average gang neighborhood ceded control to the gang years ago. Even as communities fight to keep their children out of the gangs they do not actively attempt to wrest control from the gang. The police are often looked at to solve the problem, but suppression alone does not end the cycle. The neighborhoods are faced with a traditional public goods dilemma compounded with a security paradox.

Individuals do not want to speak out until it is safe, but the community cannot become safe until people speak out.

C. IMPLICATIONS TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

The impact of this thesis is in its ability to explain how authority and control are achieved in a neighborhood. The gang may use selective incentives to initiate control, but in the maintenance of control, very little is needed. The common frame captures the gang's control and creates a log of it so it continues to maintain the gang's presence and affect individuals' decisions.

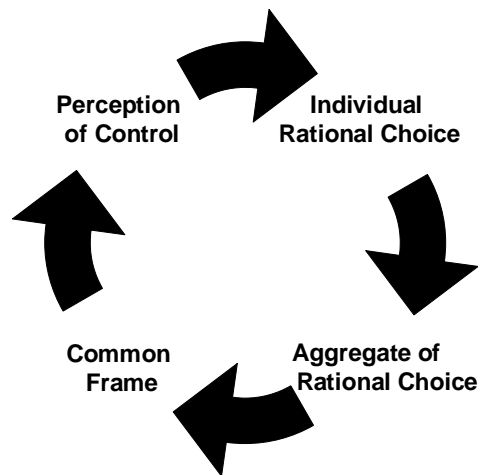


Figure 3. Growth of Control [From Common Frames].

D. FUTURE STUDIES

There are two possible avenues for further research. The first avenue would attempt to prove or disprove this thesis through statistical analysis. The second avenue looks for historical examples of how common frames have

changed in gang neighborhoods. These studies would provide data on the level of effort necessary to affect long term change in a neighborhood.

E. COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

The realization that it takes relatively little effort to maintain control of an area means that a much greater effort is required to break that hold. In the development of counterinsurgency doctrine, the role of control and its perception in the common frame becomes critical to the long-term strategy. To break the cycle of control of rebel group may have on a neighborhood means a heavy commitment of forces initially. Once the cycle of control is disrupted, the force level required to maintain control becomes relatively low if continuous recruitment is maintained.

Similar to the gang's ability to maintain control, a state authority can wrest control of a neighborhood through tactics of isolation followed by heavy involvement with the community. The state authority then uses the formal and informal social controls created to replace the isolation and force level required initially.

Current civil authorities focus efforts to end gang violence and break up gangs on a three-pronged approach. Prevention, intervention, and suppression are the three prongs of the attack. Each of these efforts relies upon the other for success. All three efforts are equally important, but this should not be confused with equal resources. If the authorities endeavor to understand the common frame being used by the individuals in the neighborhood, they can succeed in developing effective

strategies. To truly counter an insurgent or gang threat to the point that they cannot return to control the state needs to modify the common frame over time. If the common frame is not modified the individuals in the rebel area will reference the historical common frame when making decisions no matter what short term action the authority has taken. The control that the insurgency or gang exerts on an area is self-correcting when attacked on the margin. For long-term change to take effect the decisions individuals make need to be modified by changing the common frame. This is a long-term process that takes separating the population from the insurgency's or gang's control.

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